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COUNSELLING FOR MITIGATING THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL TRAUMA OF FLOOD DISASTER VICTIMS

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Abstract

Psycho-social trauma comes about when a traumatic event overloads an individual's capacity to cope with his or her usual emotional state. Psycho-social trauma cannot be predicted based on the events that precede them. Flood is an environmental hazard that occurs naturally and relatively sudden as a result of climate change. It happens in a devastating way and are brought down in good numbers. The resultant effects are particularly damaging in terms of properties and other economic/income generation structures. The focus of this work is on the psychosocial wellbeing of the victims. There is an assumption that women are more likely to suffer disproportionately in most disasters more especially flood, there is hence they are more vulnerable due to minimal access to source of emergency. The core concept here is to prevent stress disorder in the victims of flood and provide coping interventions for traumatized people from the aftermath of major flood disaster leading to displacement from homes and work place. Most flood victims make more emotional investment and are more likely to experience more post traumatic stress disorder associated with flood and consequently become more devastated emotionally and psycho-socially as it happens. The authors hold a strong view that if psycho-

social therapy is applied to victims irrespective of standing, it will remove ugly memories of the disturbance; extinguish the fears associated with the stressful events especially that which relates to re-location and loss of victims' property. The conclusion implies an integrative approach involving experts from diverse field of human being endeavours particularly counselors who are expected to mitigate victims' state of depression, anxiety and other flood inducing.

Keywords

Counselling, Psycho-Social Trauma, Flood Disaster, Victims

1. Introduction

Flood catastrophe is one of the most costly devastating broad happenings around the globe due to its great fatalities, injuries, property damage, economic and social disruption to mankind. Flood most times happens when water overflows or inundates land that is usually dry due to change in climate. This happens in a huge number of ways and the common ones are when rivers or streams overflow their banks, excessive rain, a ruptures dam or levee, rapid ice melting in the mountains or even an unfortunately placed leaver dam can overpower a river and send its spreading over the adjacent land known as a flood plain (Schminder, Elhai and Gray, 2007). Coastal flood can happen when large storm causes the sea to surge inland. Most floods take long time to spread giving resident's time to prepare or evacuate. These flash floods most time are dangerous as it turns a babbling brook into a inundating wall of water and sweeping everything in its path down streams. Flood has caused destruction in Nigeria, Ghana, Coastal areas of USA, Caribbean, East Africa to mention but a few.

A natural disaster like flood may occur with or without warning and vary considerably in intensity and type. This flood comes as hurricane, tornado, storm, high watered rain, wind driven water, tidal wave, landslides, snow-storm or explosion. Disasters whether natural or man-made can cause tremendous upheavals in people's lives. Imagine having your home destroyed by rain and all of your possessions damaged, this can cause trauma and develop distressing experiences. It may have a more devastating effect on children because this may be the only home he or she has ever had. This symptom might present like nightmare or flashbacks to disaster.

Children who have high level of post traumatic stress symptoms experience more difficulties in terms of their educational and occupational outcomes as they move into adulthood

(Olajuyigbe, 2012, Kamal & Masud 2013). This paper's main focus is to explore the human effect of flood disaster hence they bear the brunt of what flood leaves in the physical environment. Extreme weather events destroys and presents negative effect on people whose life depends mostly on climate related livelihoods like agriculture, fishing and other live endeavours. This has necessitate this write up to curb the psycho-social and psychological sphere of human operations.

2. The Process of Flooding

Flooding occurs at a time when rivers discharge and exceed their channels causing the volume of water to overflow into areas surrounding the channel known as the flood plain. Several discharges of rivers can be triggered by more than a few events. Usually, the common cause of flooding is prolonged rainfall. The ground becomes saturated when it rains for a long time and the soil will no longer be able to store water leading to enlarged surface runoff. The rain water enters the river faster than when the ground was not saturated leading to high discharge of water levels and floods.

Ajibola, Izunwanne & Ogunbemi (2012) are of the view that, even though floods are triggered directly by precipitation just a few hours after rain falls, some floods can be triggered by precipitation that fell many months ago. Precipitation that falls as snow can remain as snow on the land until it melts. When the snow does not melt, the large volume of water is held in the river increasing its discharge and triggering floods when such frozen water melts/frozen form in the rivers, lake or ocean. These kinds of floods often occurred in years when snow melts in the spring. Erupting volcanoes can trigger very large flash floods when glaciers are partially or even fully melt by some geothermal activity. The melt water can enter rivers and greatly increase the rivers discharge leading to a flood.

3. Factors Affecting Flood Frequency

➤ **Physical factor:** The size and shape of river drainage dictates how much precipitation the river can receive and how quickly it will arrive. The permeability of the soil and rock in a drainage is a big factor in flooding. The vegetation cover in a basin, the relief and steepness of the slope of the basin also affect how quickly water enters the river and how likely a river is to flood. Kolauda, Olayemi & Ajayi (2011), thinks that “the number of tributaries flowing into a river affects the likelihood of floods. After a heavy precipitation, the discharge will

rise even more and floods are likely to occur especially at confluences because this confluence is where discharge is highest”.

- **Human factor:** This is where river drainage basin or flood plain has been heavily urbanized. Urbanization involves laying down of tarmac and concrete impermeable substances that will increase surface runoff into the river and increase the river's discharge. Jonkman & Kelven (2005), observed that “urbanization involves deforestation thereby reducing vegetation cover and increase surface runoff into the river. Changes in the climate means that certain areas are going to experience more frequent and more intense storms that can lead to large floods”.

4. Effects of Flooding

Flooding has many social, economic and environmental effects that vary according to the demography of a certain population and the economic development of an area. Human patronage of a floodable area increases its vulnerability to flood.

4.1 Social effect

The most devastating effect here is death of people. Flash flood specifically kills dozens of people when in action. Flood water travels very fast and weighs heavier and can easily sweep away people's homes and even life. Large debris and objects like cars can get picked up by flood water and kill individuals that get hit by this debris.

4.2 Economic effects

A major economic effect of flood is property damage. Water can cause a huge damage to property and when it picks a large chunk of debris like a car, it can submerge or crash into buildings. It can lead to a decline in the operation of businesses, hence no power, or road movement of goods and services.

4.3 Environmental effects

Flood water contaminates and pollutes rivers and land when it drains into the river. The water that flow from the farmlands can be polluted by pesticides and other chemicals sprayed on the farmlands that are drained into the river can kill off wildlife. During the flood, sewage pipes are often broken and raw sewage leaks into the flood water. It contaminates drinking water which leads to a spread of waterborne diseases like cholera, typhoid and so on. Flood would also affect farms because farmlands are normally developed on flood plains. The flood water becomes polluted and contaminate the farmland and makes crops grow on it dangerous to eat.

Furthermore, cattle are often killed by floods which lead people to starvation because there is no income to buy food or do not have source of food that inhabits the river.

5. Counselling Strategies to Sooth Trauma in Flood Victims

Trauma is a distressing event where the individual feels severely threatened emotionally and psychologically. Most people recover from trauma of a painful loss through the support of either family, friends or counseling services. The deep emotional pains, fears, confusion from flood are therapeutically managed to accommodate this uncontrollable hazardous event in a person's life time. Trauma is an emotional exposure to unpleasant event. Most people who are exposed to catastrophic events or terrifying experiences most times show psychological reaction such as mental health issues (Adekunle & Ocholi, 2014). The magnitude of the trauma-provoking events such as watching your loved ones being drown or watching your valuables washed away. This triggers more mental and physical symptoms that can last long after the trauma event has passed. These psychological reactions are called in different forms such as adjustment disorder, depression, acute stress disorder and post traumatic stress and could manifest in anyone who is exposed to traumatic experiences irrespective of age, sex, ethnic background or race.

Although, Chukwuma (2015) and Kesieana (2016) reported that "only a minority of people exposed to potentially traumatic events will develop a persistent mental health problem, the fact that a large number of people experience these types of events means that post traumatic mental health is a significant health issue that needs to be addressed effectively in a professional context". Negative emotions become more severe when people lack the economic, social and psychological resources needed to cope with the trauma experiences. The application of cognitive behavior therapy in the treatment of adults and children with post trauma stress from flood are dispensed in the following ways:

- Exposure therapy is done by creating a detailed present account of what happened making an audio tape recording of it and asking the victims to listen to this over and over again. With this exposure, victims are helped to extinguish fears of reminders of their traumatic events.
- Stress inoculation training method – victims are helped to identify those cues that precipitate fears and are provided with skills and different coping strategies like deep breathing and muscle relaxation and encourage them to handle what is their fears on their

own. The victim is directed on how to identify cues as soon as they appear and enable them to put the newly learned coping skills into immediate action.

- Cognitive processing therapy – addressing stuck points and restructure their cognition by thinking about the problem differently and positive.
- Group therapy – people with the same trauma are encouraged to discuss their problems with each other by vetting the trauma provoking feelings and relieve the negative symptoms in their memories.
- Systematic desensitization – grade the trauma provoking events ranging from the less to the highest trauma provoking events. However, the common dictum which says that prevention is better than cure should remain a better option in this treatment.
- The rational emotive therapy that rationalizes losses and depressions as normal problems of mankind.

6. Suggestions

Hence most times flood takes people unawares and even the warning signs and technology fails or fail in the crude signal dispatch, the following information may abet the grievous effects on man and environment.

- Residents of flood prone areas should be encouraged by government and non-governmental agencies on getting drafted into flood insurance and also build flood resistant structures.
- Cover basement flood drains with permanent grids.
- Reduce flooding from other drains
- Check floor drains for a flood plug
- Prepare materials for flooding
- Shut off electricity to areas of home that might flood
- Move hazardous materials to higher locations
- Discuss safety emergency procedures with family members and office workers
- Anchor fuel tank securely
- Plan and practice an evacuation route in the home and offices
- Develop an emergency communication plan with up to date equipment

- Extensive early warnings on radio, Television and all forms of communication process to inform the public on flood hazards
- Government should establish rainfall stations within each hydrological basin
- Establishment of psychological services centre
- Construct more receiver dams so that excess water release from coastal areas will be absorbed
- Government should establish mobile clinics to flood prone areas and equip them with drugs and other logistics to enable the staff come into the needs of the victims with ease.

7. Conclusion

Changing climatic conditions is currently threatening the world by a significant economic and ecological destruction and impacting negatively on the generality of people's health. Top on this challenges or off-short of climate change is flood which is the most common devastating natural disaster killing dozens of people and damaging properties in the world even though men and women are affected. Women seem to suffer great psychological scars that most need therapists. However, all the victims of flood experiences need professional counselling as long as they are victims of ugly experience of trauma-provoking episode.

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